



Understanding the Imposter Syndrome

How is it that so many seemingly successful leaders privately suffer from imposter syndrome? A term coined by clinical psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes in 1978.

How imposter syndrome shows up

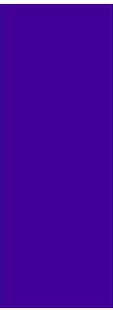
Imposter syndrome shows up in sometimes subtle or debilitating ways:

- Fear of being found out you are not what others believe
- Discount your successes by putting them down to luck or being in the right place at the right time
- 'Anyone can do what I can do' thinking
- Negate your accomplishments
- Feeling you don't have the right to be doing what you are doing
- Sense that you don't belong where you are
- Feeling of not being good enough, or unworthy of your position

Self-doubt and low self esteem contribute to feeling like an imposter, though that isn't all. After all, seemingly self confident leaders succumb to imposter syndrome ... why?

Moving into a higher position

Environmental factors can trigger these thoughts and feelings at any time in a leader's career progression. Moving out of a comfort zone into a new environment such as a higher position, a new organisation or business, or undertaking a new project which stretches you beyond what you have done before. Suddenly you find yourself surrounded by colleagues who are seemingly more qualified and more experienced. They may be well known and



highly sought after for their views and opinions and then we start comparing ourselves unfavourably to them. Then we find ourselves caught in the rip like current and carried away by the 'imposter syndrome'.

This can lead to:

- Remaining quiet in meetings you've been asked to attend.
- Deferring opportunities to others more experienced.
- Collecting more and more qualifications until you feel you are 'good enough'.

Positive new habits

Coaching tips to help overcome some of the environmental factors:

- Value all you bring to your role from your previous work and life experiences. Remember all of who you are, what you have done and achieved so far which enabled you to be chosen for the role above others who applied or were considered.
- Address the aspects of your own thinking and behaviours that might get in the way of your effectiveness as a leader.
- Decide to fully believe your referees.
- Stay committed to your development as a leader and become a life long learner.
- Give yourself permission to be on a learning curve in your new role.
- Ask yourself: "what do I need to let go of to be effective at the next meeting?" for example, in the words of Brene Brown: "I'm imperfect AND I'm enough". And I would add: "AND I'm still capable of more".

The opposite of the imposter syndrome is the belief that you are more competent than you are, which leads to a refusal to acknowledge your limitations.

Steps to freedom:

1. What had real meaning for you from what you've read?
2. What's one new behaviour you could put into practice this week from the above tips? What else?
3. What exactly will you say to yourself, or do, this week?
4. What will happen if you don't?
5. What would it take to create change on this issue for you?

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